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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a federally funded language preservation program at Leupp Public School, part of Flagstaff (Arizona) Unified School District but located on the Navajo Reservation. Funded in 1997 for 5 years, this schoolwide project is designed to help elementary students become proficient speakers, readers, and writers of Navajo while enhancing their English language skills and preparing them to meet state academic standards. The program combines Navajo immersion with English-as-a-second-language inclusion, literacy initiatives, sheltered English/Navajo, parental involvement, and take-home technologies. Academic content and state standards are initially presented from a Navajo perspective via four global themes with a unifying concept of "hozho" or "peace, beauty, and harmony." By fall 2000, the immersion program had been implemented in grades K-2 and plans for a school-based cultural center had been presented to the school district. This paper examines the need for the program and how it was developed with staff, parental, and community involvement; presents a program overview; describes the Navajo culture-based curriculum; and discusses some of the inherent challenges in developing and sustaining a language preservation program based upon a Navajo-specific curriculum in the English-only era of high-stakes testing. (SV)

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Racing Against Time: A Report on the Leupp Navajo Immersion Project

Michael Fillerup

This paper describes a U.S. Department of Education Title VII funded language preservation program at Leupp Public School in the Navajo Nation. Funded in 1997 for five years, this school-wide project is designed to help students become proficient speakers, readers, and writers of Navajo while enhancing their English language skills and preparing them to meet state academic standards. The program combines Navajo immersion with ESL inclusion, literacy initiatives, sheltered English/Navajo, parental involvement, and take-home technology. Academic content and state standards are initially presented from a Navajo perspective via four global themes with a unifying concept of hozho or "peace, beauty, and harmony." This paper (1) presents the need for the program and how it was developed with staff, parental, and community involvement, (2) presents a program overview, (3) discribes the Navajo-specific curriculum, and (4) discusses some of the inherent challenges in developing and sustaining a language preservation program based upon a Navajo-specific curriculum in the English-only era of high stakes testing.

Díí binahjį́ niha'ałchíní biląąjį' hózhǫǫ doo, bikéédęę' hózhǫǫ doo, biyaa hózhǫǫ doo, bikáá'dęę' hózhǫǫ doo, dóó binaagóó hózhǫǫ doo.

In beauty they will walk, in beauty they have walked, in beauty they will learn their Diné language and culture.

In the fall of 1978 I started my teaching career at Chinle Junior High School on the Navajo Reservation. By this point in time, the English language had made significant inroads on the Navajo Nation. John Travolta was wooing my junior high students in *Saturday Night Fever* and the rock group KISS was very much in vogue. Nevertheless, while I never conducted a formal survey, I would say that 90% of the students at Chinle Junior High could still speak their tribal language. Back then, Navajos living on the reservation spoke Navajo. It was a given. I do know for a fact that every one of the teenagers in the church youth group I supervised could speak Navajo quite well. Any time they wanted to make fun of my *bilagaana* mannerisms or Quixote countenance they whispered vociferously among themselves in their native tongue. (I was an easy target, by the way.) If someone had told me then that within a generation the Navajo language would be dying a swift death, I would have scoffed: "No way, John Wayne!"

Now flash forward 18 years. It is the 1996-97 school year, and I am the director of Bilingual and English as a Second Language programs for the Flag-

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staff Unified School District (FUSD). One of the 18 site-based programs I supervise is located 45 miles east of Flagstaff, Arizona, on the western edge of the Navajo Reservation. Leupp Public School serves about 270 students in grades K-8, 99% of whom are Navajo. Almost all of the students come from low-income families, and the community's unemployment rate is 58%. In addition, about one-half of the students are limited in their ability to use the English language. Demographically speaking, Leupp is a typical reservation community.

I say this with great misgiving. There is no question that the statistics on American Indians are abysmal. For years, they have led the nation in negative indicators, including: highest dropout rates (Swisher, 1991); highest unemployment rates (Szasz, 1991); highest poverty rates (Hodgkinson, Outz, & Obarakpor, 1990); and highest suicide rates (Bowker, 1993). Add to these the fact that American Indians have inordinately high instances of alcoholism, fetal alcohol syndrome, depression, and substance abuse (Szasz, 1991), and it would be hard to argue with Coombs' (1970) charge that our nation's educational system has placed the American Indian "at the absolute bottom of the barrel among the country's ethnic minorities and socio-economically disadvantaged groups" (p. 11).

In the case of Leupp, there are other disturbing statistics. As the only reservation school in the FUSD, Leupp has occupied the cellar in standardized test scores for several years now. For example, in 1995 Leupp 4th graders scored 25, 21, and 16 percentile points lower in reading, language, and mathematics, respectively, than students at FUSD schools in town. The differential among 7th graders was even more pronounced, with in-town students outperforming Leupp students by 27, 27, and 23 percentile points in reading, language, and math.

As educators, we know that if a child does not develop strong literacy skills at a fairly young age, that child will be academically crippled throughout his or her school career, however long or short that may be. For graduates from Leupp Public School, educational careers tend to be shorter rather than longer. Although they represent only 7.5% of the student body at Sinagua High, the feeder school for Leupp graduates, 25% of the school's dropouts are from Leupp.

These statistics are not presented to throw you into a state of hopelessness and despair. If you have worked in Indian education for any length of time these figures probably sound all too familiar. I present them as an argument for a different type of educational program for indigenous minorities. The starting point is to reclaim that which has been taken away. I am not talking so much about land as I am about the heart of a people. And the heart of a people is passed down through the generations via language. Language, of course, is the primary vehicle through which we express poetry, literature, genealogy, history, philosophy, and religion. It is through language that we define who and what we are, and our unique place in the universe. On a more direct level, Reyhner and Tennant (1995) have claimed that language is inextricably bound to one's cultural values, and cultural values are "psychological imperatives" that affect one's self-awareness, identity, interpersonal relationships, self-confidence, and success in life. They argue that,

> giving young Natives the opportunity to keep and learn their tribal language offers them a strong antidote to the culture clash many of them are experiencing but cannot verbalize. (p. 280)

This is why an even more disturbing statistic than the ones previously mentioned is the light-speed decline of the Navajo language. A 1994 study revealed that only 45% of Navajo Headstart children had any knowledge of the Diné (Navajo) language, and most had only limited knowledge (Bippus & Bray, 1994). Other reports have indicated that lack of knowledge of the Navajo language to be as high as 50% in reservation and bordertown schools (Division of Diné Education, 1996). Unfortunately, data for Leupp Public School painted an even grimmer picture. Navajo language proficiency tests in the fall of 1996 revealed that only 7% of the students could speak Navajo fluently, while 11% had limited proficiency, and 82% had no proficiency (FUSD, 1997).

So we go back to 1996. Ironically, the FUSD is embroiled in a bitter lawsuit filed by members of the Leupp community who have accused the district of discriminatory practices. Specifically, they have charged that the FUSD has failed to provide Leupp with facilities, services, staffing, equipment, and materials that are equitable with those of the 17 in-town schools. While the Leupp lawsuit does not force the district to pursue a native language program at Leupp, it certainly helps to create an environment for proactive change. So did the Leupp principal, Joan Gilmore. The daughter of George Kirk, a Navajo Code Talker, Gilmore is passionately committed to preserving the Navajo language and culture. She is a stark contrast to her *bilagaana* predecessors, one of whom eyed me warily when I suggested a bilingual Navajo/ English program at Leupp 15 years ago: "We don't want any of that here."

Gilmore and several other staff members were shocked by the 1996 test results: less than one out of ten students can speak the language. There was a sense of urgency. We knew that we had to do something and do it fast. We started with a survey of parents and community members to determine two things: (1) Do the parents and community of Leupp want a Navajo/English bilingual program? (2) Will the parents and community support a bilingual program if it is offered? We know that if the parents do not back the program, or simply do not care, our efforts will be fruitless.

The outcome of the survey was as shocking as the results of the Navajo proficiency tests. Over 95% of the parents "greatly favor[ed]" a bilingual program, and 100% indicated they would support the program if it was implemented. Although some faculty and staff at Leupp School opposed the initiative, we argued that a few individuals do not have the right to deprive Navajo children of the opportunity to be taught in their tribal tongue, especially if this option is supported and valued by their parents and their community.

In the spring of 1997, we applied for and were awarded a $1.5 million Title VII grant from the U.S. Department of Education to develop a Navajo/English bilingual program. The icing on the cake came in December 1997 when the Leupp Chapter House signed a resolution to formally endorse the program.

The Leupp Project

The heart of The Leupp Bilingual Education Project is to provide all Leupp students with Navajo-based education delivered largely via the Navajo language. However, there are other key components that supplement the Navajo language initiative, including:

1. TAKE-HOME TECHNOLOGY: Leupp has the highest poverty rate of any school in the FUSD. Many students live in remote areas without electricity or running water, let alone home computers. Grant monies are used to purchase battery-powered laptop computers. These are checked out to students and parents who use the computers to complete specific classroom assignments at home. In addition to improving computer literacy skills this Take-Home Technology program helps "demystify" technology in rural Navajo homes.
2. GIFTED SERVICES: In 1996-97, only nine students at Leupp School were identified as gifted or talented, as opposed to 805 gifted students at the in-town schools. A gifted resource teacher was hired to implement alternative measures to identify more gifted students, provide training to classroom teachers on how to incorporate critical thinking activities into the regular classroom curriculum, and provide supplementary services to gifted students. Interestingly, the gifted resource teacher found that by simply screening more students using conventional methods, the number of gifted students triples.
3. SHELTERED INSTRUCTION: All classroom teachers are trained in the use of sheltered instructional strategies (i.e., extensive use of visuals, peer tutoring, cooperative learning, whole language instruction, thematic units, project-centered field-based activities, and so forth). In addition to helping students bridge the gap between language and content, many of these strategies are more conducive to American Indian learning styles than traditional teaching techniques. Teachers write up an individualized Language Acquisition Plan documenting how each child's academic, linguistic, social, and cultural needs will be met.
4. FAMILY LITERACY AND PARENT INVOLVEMENT: Leupp offers an Adult Education and Family Literacy Program in which parents can earn a GED, improve literacy skills, and learn basic math and other subjects. Beginning Navajo and Navajo literacy classes are offered free of charge. A home/school coordinator strengthens the connection between Leupp School and Navajo families by making home visits, providing parent workshops, and offering special cultural activities.
5. LEUPP/SINAGUA HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION PROGRAM: A home/school coordinator is stationed at Sinagua High School to develop a program to help Leupp students make the cultural, academic, and linguistic leap from an all-Indian K-8 reservation school (Leupp) to a predominately white high school in the city. Transition activities include home visits, mentoring, parent and student preparation workshops, special cultural counseling, and careful monitoring of Leupp students who attend Sinagua High. On the average, 260 hours of in-service training is provided each year. In addition, Title VII mon-

ies are used to pay the tuition for teachers and staff to take college coursework towards state ESL or bilingual certification. Teachers and staff have completed a total of 518 credit hours of college coursework, or an average of 173 credit hours per year.

6. INTENSIFIED SUMMER INSTRUCTION: Title VII funds are used to extend learning opportunities by providing five weeks of summer school instruction to Leupp students. High school students from the Leupp community take classes for high school credit at no charge.
7. STAFF DEVELOPMENT: The project provides extensive staff development opportunities, including tuition and books for college coursework, cultural workshops, and conferences. For example, during the first year of the project, all teachers and staff at Leupp (62 total), 13 from Sinagua High, five district-level administrators, and one school board member participate in Hooghan University, a series of workshops designed to sensitize individuals about Navajo culture.

In addition to these components the following initiatives are implemented to improve student literacy at Leupp:

1. SUSTAINED SILENT READING (SSR): All students and staff read silently for the first 15 minutes of each school day.
2. READ ACROSS THE REZ PROGRAM: Students and classrooms are rewarded for the number of books read at home.
3. BOOKS IN THE HOME: This initiative attempts to place ten additional books in the home of each Leupp student each year.
4. EXPANDED LIBRARY HOURS: Leupp pursues an agreement with Coconino County to expand the collections and hours of the school library to serve Leupp and the surrounding community.

There is not much controversy surrounding the above mentioned components of the project. For the most part, they are viewed by teacher and staff as desired additions to the existing programs at Leupp. The Navajo language initiative is a different story.

The Navajo Immersion Program

In the fall of 1997, a committee consisting of Leupp faculty, staff, parents, and community members was formed to review and develop a blueprint for the Navajo language program. Most committee members agreed that it is best to teach students *through* the Navajo language rather than *about* the language. However, the amount of time that should be devoted to instruction via Navajo elicited a lengthy and lively discussion. Opinions ranged from those favoring full immersion in Navajo to minimalists who feel an hour a day of Navajo is sufficient. The former camp agreed that full immersion was necessary to jump-start Kindergarten students in their Navajo language development. The minimalists feared that English language development would suffer in a Navajo-only

program. In the end, the committee arrived at a compromise: Leupp students would be taught subject matter through the use of the Navajo language for at least half of the school day. The committee also agreed on a set of program goals and assumptions upon which the program is predicated:

Goals:

- BILINGUALISM: Students will acquire the ability to speak, read, write, and communicate effectively in different social and cultural contexts in Navajo and in English.
- ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: Students will meet the district and state standards in all academic subjects.
- CULTURAL ENRICHMENT: Students will gain an in-depth understanding of the Navajo culture and its philosophical, historical, social, intellectual, and spiritual relationship to the social and academic mainstream.

Assumptions:

- Language is the lifeblood of culture.
- The ability to speak the Navajo language is essential to the self-identity of a Navajo child and to an understanding of the Navajo way of life.
- It is just as important for a Navajo child to learn the Navajo language as it is for him or her to learn English. However, both languages must be learned and learned well. As Dick Littlebear (1990) explains, the English language may provide physical sustenance to American Indians, but tribal languages will feed their spirits.
- An immersion program will help preserve the Navajo language and the Navajo culture. A Navajo immersion program will provide a medium through which Navajo children can communicate and thereby connect with their Elders. This linguistic bridge to the past will also form a bridge to the future as subsequent generations of Navajo children learn to speak, read, and write the language of their ancestors.
- A language cannot be preserved solely through the schools. Language instruction must begin in the home, and language preservation must be a community-wide effort.
- The Navajo language and culture are inherently good and ought to be preserved. The Navajo people and the Navajo language have played an important role in the history of the United States. For example, the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II developed and utilized an unbreakable code based upon the Navajo language that saved thousands of American lives in the Pacific War.
- The United States Government has a legal responsibility to "preserve, protect, and promote the rights and freedom of Native Americans to use, practice, and develop Native American languages" (Native American Languages Act, 1990)
- The Leupp community, the Navajo tribe, and the Flagstaff Unified School District value the Navajo language and culture.
- People who can speak, read, and write more than one language have certain cognitive, academic, social, cultural, and professional advantages over those who cannot. (FUSD, 2000)

Characteristics

The Navajo Immersion Curriculum is Navajo specific, meaning that subject matter is taught initially from a Navajo perspective. For example, one of the district's Kindergarten social studies goals states: *"Students will show respect for others."* Students in the Navajo Immersion Program are taught traditional Navajo forms of respect, including how to enter a hogan and how to greet people in the Navajo way. Building upon this foundation knowledge, the formalities and etiquette of the mainstream culture are later taught within a broader context.

In the unit on plants (Nanise'), students learn about the importance of corn to the Navajo, as well as traditional uses of plants (e.g., for food, dyes, the arts, tools, medicine, and ceremonies). Students participate in the traditional practice of running to the east to greet the rising sun as part of the unit on exercise (Naa' azdilts ood). The unit on astronomy introduces students to Navajo constellations and Navajo beliefs about the heavens as well as the western view of astronomy.

Organization

Central to the Navajo culture is the concept of *hózhó*, or maintaining a life of "peace, beauty, and harmony." Likewise, *hózhó* is the unifying theme of the Navajo Immersion Curriculum. All objectives and activities are designed to help students develop themselves intellectually, physically, spiritually, and socially so they may "walk in beauty." The curriculum is organized in fours, the sacred Navajo number.

Subject matter is presented holistically through four global themes, each representing one of the Four Sacred Mountains of the Navajo and its corresponding cardinal direction—HEALTH: EAST (Mt. Blanca): LIVING THINGS: SOUTH (Mt. Taylor): FAMILY and COMMUNITY: WEST (San Francisco Peaks): EARTH and SKY: NORTH (Hesperus Peak). Each global theme is designed to be presented over a period of about nine weeks.

Four thematic units have been developed for each global theme. Each unit includes a goal, objectives, key vocabulary, and suggested activities. Objectives are correlated with the Arizona State Standards, and suggested activities are cross-referenced with the unit objectives.

The following is a sample thematic unit from the global theme family and community:

Global Theme: Family and Community

Global Goal: To develop an awareness of self and to perpetuate the Navajo language, culture, and traditions relative to family, friends, and community.

Thematic Unit: SELF (Shí)

Thematic Goal: To develop an awareness of self. Táá hó ádaa ákozdínóodzįįł

Objectives: The students will:

Learn in Beauty

1. Demonstrate respect for themselves, classmates, and others
2. Identify who they are by their two clan affiliations (maternal & paternal)
3. Identify Diné cultural values
4. Identify the parts of a cradle-board and explain its purpose
5. Identify the five senses
6. Identify the location of their home

Suggested Activities (correlated with objectives):

1. Perform student duties (1, 3)
2. Make clan charts; introduce yourself (1, 2, 3, 6)
3. Make a family tree with pictures (2)
4. Make a model cradle-board (3, 4)
5. Draw a self-portrait and label body parts (1, 5)
6. Sing "Shí Naashá" (1, 3)
7. Make "Me" books (1, 2, 3, 5, 6)
8. Discuss and graph likes and dislikes (1, 5)

Subject matter is taught in an integrated manner. For example, the following Suggested Activity, *Visit local hogans; keep a sketch book of types*, integrates four subject areas:

1. STATE LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARD 2: Communicate by drawing, telling, or writing.
2. DISTRICT SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARD 10: Identify home, local neighborhood, and school.
3. STATE MATH STANDARD 2: Collect, organize, and describe simple data.
4. STATE VISUAL ARTS STANDARD 1: Students know and apply the arts disciplines, techniques, and processes to communicate in original or interpretive work.

Figure 1 illustrates how the various unit activities can be used to teach multiple subjects in an integrated fashion.

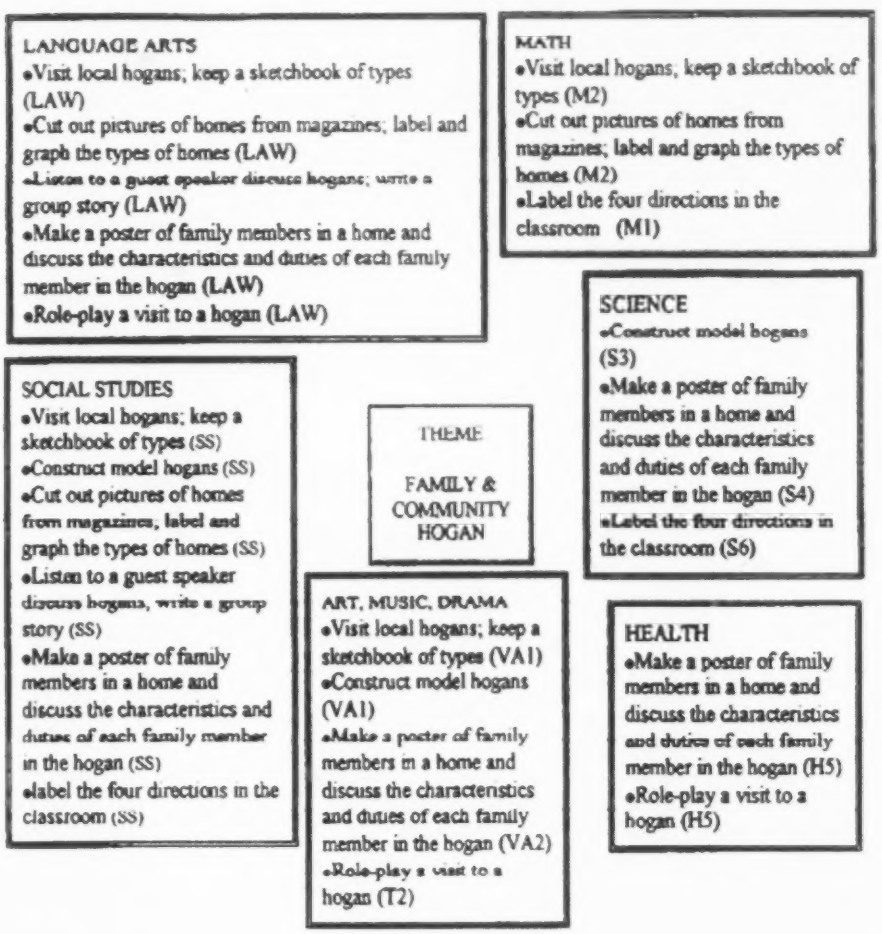
Cultural Center

In the Summer of 1998, two individuals were hired by the FUSD, each of whom play a very different but significant role in the future of Leupp Public School: Mrs. Amy Begay and Mr. Larry Bramblett. Begay, a Title VII-funded Bilingual Resource Teacher, is responsible for implementing the new Diné Immersion Curriculum at Leupp. In addition, she serves as the Navajo language teacher trainer, materials developer, and program specialist. Bramblett, on the other hand, was hired as the new superintendent of FUSD. Bramblett was impressed with the Navajo (Diné) Immersion Program. He was also convinced that Navajo children can succeed in school if expectations are high and equal

opportunities are provided. Within a year, Leupp Public School received a make-over. A green lawn and a sign chiseled out of adobe now greets visitors in front, and crushed red rock and juniper trees landscape the exterior.

In the spring of 1999, Principal Joan Gilmore was replaced by Louise Scott, Leupp Public School's second Navajo principal. Scott shares Gilmore's commitment to preserve the Navajo language and culture and brings with her several years of experience with Navajo transitional, dual language, and immersion programs. In the fall of 1999, Scott presented Superintendent Bramblett with a proposal to create a Navajo Cultural Center to be constructed on the grounds of Leupp Public School. FUSD committed $30,000 to the project. The purpose of the center is to provide students with an educational experience that integrates academic subjects, vocational skills, and Navajo culture with traditional arts,

Figure 1. Sample web showing unit activities (FUSD, 2000)


LANGUAGE ARTS
•Visit local hogans; keep a sketchbook of types (LAW)
•Cut out pictures of homes from magazines; label and graph the types of homes (LAW)
•Listen to a guest speaker discuss hogans; write a group story (LAW)
•Make a poster of family members in a home and discuss the characteristics and duties of each family member in the hogan (LAW)
•Role-play a visit to a hogan (LAW)
MATH
•Visit local hogans; keep a sketchbook of types (M2)
•Cut out pictures of homes from magazines; label and graph the types of homes (M2)
•Label the four directions in the classroom (M1)
SCIENCE
•Construct model hogans (S3)
•Make a poster of family members in a home and discuss the characteristics and duties of each family member in the hogan (S4)
•Label the four directions in the classroom (S6)
SOCIAL STUDIES
•Visit local hogans; keep a sketchbook of types (SS)
•Construct model hogans (SS)
•Cut out pictures of homes from magazines, label and graph the types of homes (SS)
•Listen to a guest speaker discuss hogans, write a group story (SS)
•Make a poster of family members in a home and discuss the characteristics and duties of each family member in the hogan (SS)
•label the four directions in the classroom (SS)
THEME
FAMILY & COMMUNITY HOGAN
ART, MUSIC, DRAMA
•Visit local hogans; keep a sketchbook of types (VA1)
•Construct model hogans (VA1)
•Make a poster of family members in a home and discuss the characteristics and duties of each family member in the hogan (VA2)
•Role-play a visit to a hogan (T2)
HEALTH
•Make a poster of family members in a home and discuss the characteristics and duties of each family member in the hogan (H5)
•Role-play a visit to a hogan (H5)

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crafts, dance, music, and storytelling. The Cultural Center will serve four functions:

- Student Learning Center and Learning Lab
- Community Learning Center
- Global Resource Center
- Cultural Arts Center

The Cultural Center will include an 800 square foot hogan, shadehouses, a male sweatlodge, a female sweatlodge, a garden, and a sheep corral and will facilitate a variety of activities, such as:

- Navajo language and culture classes
- Cultural and Historical Museum (of Leupp and the Navajo Reservation) designed, developed, and operated by Leupp students
- Community meetings and workshops
- Integrated thematic/academic projects
- Showcase for student academic work, arts, crafts, etc.
- Storytelling
- Traditional dances
- Tours provided by Leupp students
- Performances for students from other schools/districts

As part of the thematic units, students will apply their knowledge of math and science to construct shadehouses and traditional sweatlodges. Students will plant and maintain a garden, eating the foods that they grow. A corral will be built so that students can raise sheep and use them for traditional purposes. Morning runs to greet the rising sun will be included as part of the units on health and well-being. Students will decorate the interior of the Hogan Center with murals featuring events from Navajo history. The Hogan Center will also house artifacts and cultural projects created by the students. Visitors to the cultural center will be given guided tours by students who will inform them about the culture, language, and history of the Navajo. Instead of planting seeds in paper cups and monitoring their growth, young learners at Leupp will prepare the ground, plant corn seeds in soil they have furrowed, water the seeds, and tend the garden. They will learn about the historical and symbolic significance of corn to the Navajo. They will harvest the corn and with help from their parents and elders make corn meal mush, corn cakes, and other corn dishes that they will eat as part of a culminating cultural celebration. In conventional classrooms, students often dissect frogs or worms, taboo activities to traditional Navajos. Leupp middle school students will learn about internal anatomy by assisting in or observing traditional sheep butcherings. They will learn the traditional teachings about why it is acceptable to take an animal's life in one context but not in another and how no part of the animal is wasted. In the process, Leupp students will acquire a far deeper knowledge and appreciation of science, math, social studies, language, and the innate cultural connections between them.

In other words, raising sheep, tending a garden, performing Navajo songs and dances, and learning about traditional science, arts, crafts, and storytelling will be part of what students do when they attend Leupp Public School. State and district standards will be taught through these activities. What we are striving for is a different way of teaching—a marriage between the Old Ways and the New Ways. This union is exemplified in our Cultural CD ROM Project, where Leupp students interview Navajo elders about their personal stories, videotape traditional weavers and artisans at work, and document various cultural traditions. This information is presented on the CD-ROM in Navajo with a voice-over in English. Using modern technology, Navajo students can work collaboratively with their elders to preserve their history, language, and culture.

Challenges, problems, concerns

At the end of the project's third year, Navajo language instruction had been implemented in Kindergarten and first grade and was in the fall of 2000 being expanded to the second grade. An additional grade will be added each year until all students at Leupp are receiving bilingual instruction. One student shadehouse project was completed, as well as the male and female sweatlodges. Construction on the hogan center was also started in the fall of 2000. On paper it appears as if things are progressing smoothly. However, we face many of the challenges common to language revitalization projects throughout the world. These include:

1. Lack of Certified Navajo Teachers: At Leupp, there are six bilingual instructional aides and three certified Navajo-speaking teachers, one at Kindergarten, one at first grade, and one at second grade. In the past, the bilingual aides provided Navajo language instruction for part of the day as an enrichment activity. However, this sent the wrong message to the students; i.e., that Navajo is a subordinate language, an add-on if we have time for it. Consequently, we are committed to having certified Navajo teachers in each immersion classroom working collaboratively with the Navajo-speaking aides.

   This commitment has created anxiety for two reasons. First, as the program expands to third grade and beyond, we will need to find more certified Navajo-speaking teachers. Second, although they have been assured that no teachers will be involuntarily transferred to another school because of the program, some non-Navajo speakers feel threatened by the need for Navajo speaking teachers. There is no question that, over time, many of the retiring teachers and teachers who voluntarily transfer to other schools should be replaced by Navajo speakers, if Leupp is truly to become a Navajo language school. However, in the interim, the shortage of Navajo teachers can be addressed by creative scheduling, such as multi-age classrooms team-taught by a Navajo and a non-Navajo speaking teacher, the former providing the Navajo instruction, the latter the instruction in English.
2. Lack of Navajo Language Materials: The lack of native language content materials, especially in the upper grades, remains a serious problem. The Navajo language materials market is too small to attract major commercial publish-

ers, so we, like other Navajo programs on the reservation, continue to laboriously develop our own materials while relying on the efforts of the Navajo Curriculum Centers that survived the funding cuts in the eighties.

3. Lack of Navajo Testing Materials: Instruments to assess language and content knowledge via Navajo are as scarce as Navajo language materials. We develop, borrow, and adapt as we go. Instruments are not normed or standardized and can be subjective and exclusive.
4. Lack of Community Participation: One common feature shared by successful language revitalization projects throughout the world is a high level of community involvement and a sense of community ownership in the school. We have not yet achieved that at Leupp School. We may have to overcome a bit of history first. As survivors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) boarding schools, many parents in Leupp still view the school as a closed shop. We plan to change this perception through the increased presence of Navajo language and culture in the school, the introduction of the Cultural Center, and a more pronounced effort to invite parents and community leaders into the school as consultants, volunteers, and mentors in classrooms and on curriculum development committees and parent councils.
5. A House Divided: When the idea of a bilingual program was first presented to the Leupp staff, about a third of the teachers and staff were in favor of it, a third vehemently opposed it, and a third were unsure. There were many meetings and discussions, some of them heated. Opponents expressed a sincere concern that Navajo children needed to improve their English if they were going to succeed, especially since the state graduation exam, Arizona's Instrument for Measuring Success (AIMS), is only offered in English. Ironically, several Navajo employees were the most vocal opponents of the program, having experienced firsthand the "English Only" regime of the boarding schools. Since the implementation of the program in the fall of 1997, most of the "undecideds" have joined the proponents, but opposition to the program continues, although in more subtle ways.

Some recommendations

Some of the aforementioned problems are internal or local issues that need to be addressed in-house. Others, however, could be resolved if the various Navajo immersion and bilingual programs throughout the reservation and the bordertowns formed a consortium to address common concerns, provide training, share resources, and collaborate on the development of Navajo assessments, materials, and curriculum. This collaborative effort could reduce duplication of labor and free up time and resources, allowing us to create far more instructional and testing materials than any one program could possibly develop alone. However, this type of collaboration will require a certain level of standardization in terms of language, Navajo terminology for the academic content areas, and curriculum goals and objectives. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, it may be an essential next step if we are to petition the state to provide the AIMS test in Navajo. It may also be essential if we are to preserve the language.

Closing thoughts

The problem with language loss is that it can happen so quickly and effortlessly, without much hoopla or high drama. There was a time when the U.S. Government actively tried to eradicate American Indian languages. The strategy was simple: kill the language and you kill the culture. Kill the culture, and you eliminate the people. This was the Government's solution to the so called "Indian Problem." So in BIA boarding schools young American Indians were often punished for speaking their native tongue.

But compulsion has never been as successful as persuasion. English has become the lingua franca not only because it is the language of money but also because it is the primary tongue of Hollywood, MTV, and the NBA. And with these come glitz, glamor, hype, and all things cool and wannabe. We as educators can rant and rave about how important it is to preserve the language, but to a seven year old child it is the moment that counts, not the blood and tears of their ancestors.

In 1978, my first year on the reservation, many Navajo still lacked electricity and running water. Today, if you travel to the most remote corners of the reservation, you will see satellite dishes sprouting from the rooftops. Today, federal legislation protects indigenous languages. American Indians cannot be prohibited from speaking their tribal tongue. They can, however, be persuaded not to speak it or simply lulled into a state of denial or indifference about its death.

In March 2000, I had the opportunity to visit some of the highly successful Maori Immersion schools in New Zealand. Thanks to Professor Timoti Karetu I was also able to participate in a *marae*, or traditional gathering. In my informal conversations with Maori immersion teachers, I was impressed by their passionate commitment to their work. They told tales of broken treaties and their bitter struggle to create Maori language schools. I sensed that back in the 1970s the Maori people had reached a point in time—do or die, so to speak—when they realized they must either fight to preserve their language and culture or allow it to be consumed by English. They chose to fight.

The Navajo have reached a similar crisis point. If they do not act now and galvanize their efforts to revitalize the Navajo language, it will be lost within another generation. And if Navajo, the most widely used of all our American Indian languages, dies, what hope remains for other indigenous languages in this country? I realize there are concerns and apprehensions about using Navajo as the primary language of instruction. "How will our students pass the AIMS test?" "They'll fall even further behind in English!" Yes, it will require a leap of faith. It will require an appeal to history. We have tried "English Only" with the Navajo for over 130 years, and the results have been catastrophic. With Navajo immersion programs, we cannot do worse, and most indicators suggest we will do much better.

But as I write this, my thoughts keep returning to the image of a young Navajo watching the TV screen in awe and wonder as the currently famous basketball player Michael Jordan flies through the air. I think it is safe to say that

the macro-culture is not going to ride off into the sunset and magically disappear. It is here to stay, and it will become even more prevalent as we progress through the new millennium. The challenge for the Navajo will be finding a way to Walk and Learn in Beauty despite encroachments from the world beyond the mesa. This is not news to the Navajo. For centuries their culture has not only survived but flourished largely owing to their ability to selectively borrow things and ideas from the outside and adapt them in ways that remain uniquely Navajo. But language is the key.

Ultimately, it is through language that we not only preserve what we have but create and re-create that which is to come. And if we can ignite the fire of everyday life back into the language, we will no longer be racing against the clock, but instead trying to outrun the sun: the former quest is finite, the latter eternal.

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